

LOUISVILLE

The City at The Falls



The founding and development of Louisville, the largest city in Kentucky, was not done by the settlers of just one nation. At least six national groups played prominent roles in the exploration, settlement and development of the village that grew up at the falls of the Ohio River.

In order of appearance, these groups were Spanish, French, English, Scotch, Irish and German.

Although the area around the falls—actually a stairstep-like, mile-long series of drops over which the river descended some 30 feet—was known to American Indians, the first white men in the area were Spanish missionaries in the late 17th Century. During the next 100 years, a long line of French explorers, trappers and surveyors saw the falls, stopped for a brief time and then moved on up or down the river.

It was not until 1773 that the first permanent white settlement was attempted at the falls. With a small band of

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frontiersmen, Capt. Thomas Bullitt established a camp near the foot of present-day Second Street.

After spending nearly a year in the section, however, Bullitt and his men left and it remained for George Rogers Clark, leading a band of 120 soldiers and 20 English, Scotch and Irish families, to establish the first real settlement. That came in 1778 when he set up a base for operations against the British Northwest—from where Indian attacks against the entire Kentucky frontier were being directed—on Corn Island, a tiny spit of land above the falls which now is gone, worn away by the river.

After Clark and his soldier band had captured the British positions at Kaskaskia, Cahokia and Vincennes, thus easing the Indian menace, cabins were built on the mainland in the winter of 1778-1779. Fort Nelson was erected for protection. A plaque at the corner of Seventh and Main Streets details the establishment of the fort.

These cabins and the fort became the nucleus of a village that was named Louisville in honor of King Louis XVI of France.

(Although the correct pronunciation of the name of the city is "Looieville," natives generally pronounce it "Loo-uh-vull.")

Because the Ohio was a main route of civilization moving from the Eastern Seaboard into the Middle West, and because it was situated at the falls of the stream, Louisville